

Grant's Actions in Cairo Prevent Illinois Ravage

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Baltasar Gracian said, "Great ability develops and reveals itself increasingly with every new assignment". With every task more is unveiled of something great. Many think of Ulysses S. Grant in this way. When given a chance, Grant strode ahead and took the upcoming challenge. As a result, Ulysses S. Grant and the Twenty-first Illinois Infantry Regiment he trained based themselves in Cairo, Illinois, and went to Paducah and Belmont to prevent the Confederate army from traveling north; therefore he saved Illinois from the postwar ravage that would have ruined it as it did the South.

Grant's journey began in Galena. He had moved there to work in his father's shop. Galena's company needed training; Grant was signed up for the job because he had military background. Because he accomplished the job so well, they offered him the position of Captain, which he declined. He obtained command over the Seventh District Regiment, also known as, the Twenty-first Illinois Infantry Regiment. Once Colonel of the Twenty-first Illinois Infantry Regiment, Grant was ordered to the District of Southwest Missouri. He journeyed to Cairo on September 4, 1861, to command the military district and establish his headquarters.

Grant contributed much to the Union army. First, Grant added a well-disciplined regiment to the army. Even before entering Cairo, Grant started the tough training.

Rather than allow the Twenty-first Regiment to travel to Cairo on the trains, he forced them to march. Here soldiers caught their first glimpse of discipline in war. They realized that they could not be lazy under Grant. The long, hard march not only disciplined them, but also toughened them for future attacks. In Cairo, Grant recognized the military district. He ordered the nearby saloons closed, and urged the company officers to read the Articles of War to their commands. When men from the Eleventh and Twentieth Illinois regiments stole honey, Grant fined them and paid the owner. Equally important was the fact that Grant sent soldiers to Paducah from Cairo. There were no casualties, and Paducah had strategic importance at the time. Grant sent soldiers to Fort Belmont. Though a number of casualties, it was the first important Union success.

Ulysses S. Grant was known for fighting in the war, but was involved with other dealings to improve conditions in Cairo and for the Union army. First, Grant enhanced the mailing system. He asked an employee of the Post Office Department to visit Cairo and start a system where soldiers' letters were top priority. A wagon followed them even as they marched. In this way, soldiers were able to keep in touch with their families. The soldiers asked for much needed supplies through the letters. They began to cooperate readily because they knew what was happening at home. Then, Grant improved the unsanitary conditions of Cairo. Soldiers were sickened by the fever, dysentery, and malaria spread by rats and mosquitoes. The troops' encampments were drowned in mud when it rained. Grant worked with Dr. Joseph H. Brinton, an army surgeon. Grant suggested

Mound City as a site for hospitals because it had empty warehouses along the river, which were easily accessible. Grant always stayed on task and promptly helped when he could.

Grant had to stop the Confederates from coming up north, using the river. He accomplished this within a week of command, when he entered Paducah peacefully. Paducah is just south of Cairo on the Mississippi river. Grant, informed of the Confederate's plans to siege Paducah a day after receiving command of Cairo, sent a letter to his comrades stating that if not restricted he would continue to Paducah. Grant arrived in Paducah on September 6, 1861, accompanied by the Ninth and Eleventh regiments. The Confederate army was only ten to fifteen miles away, when the Union army entered Paducah. Unaware of the small number of Union troops, the Confederates turned back. The people of Paducah, Kentucky were southern supporters. They did not welcome the Union army. Therefore, Grant wrote a proclamation declaring the Union army as friend, not foe. Some believed it wrong of Grant to go to Paducah without orders. However, President Lincoln supported Grant's actions; he believed if the neutral state of Kentucky left the Union, "Missouri and Maryland would follow". Paducah was of strategic importance, as well. It could be used to take the battle into the south. By taking Paducah, Grant prevented the Confederate army from traveling farther north. This protected Cairo and Illinois. If the Confederates had taken Paducah, the Union may have lost the war. Grant, however, stopped this from happening.

Grant received orders stating that Belmont should be protected. He took 2,700 men from Cairo to Belmont on November 7, 1861. Landing on the Missouri side of the

river, the Union soldiers marched the last mile to Belmont. On the way, they destroyed the rebel's supplies and equipment. When Grant and his men arrived in Belmont, the southerners fled. They began to celebrate. Meanwhile, the Confederates regrouped between the Union soldiers and their boats. Fighting it out, Grant was forced to leave behind 600 men, dead or wounded. This raised much criticism. Belmont, located in Missouri, along the Mississippi River, was across from Columbus, a major Confederate base. Grant, trying to keep them at bay, did not expect a battle. Later he realized his men were waiting for this chance to fight their country's enemies. Moreover, the raid convinced the rebels to change their plans to invade Missouri. If the Confederates had invaded Missouri, the Union army might have failed to defend themselves. From Missouri, Illinois could have been invaded. Grant prevented this occurrence, helping Illinois survive the Civil War.

Basing himself and the Twenty-first Illinois Infantry Regiment in Cairo, Illinois and traveling to Paducah and Belmont to prevent the Confederate army from traveling north, Ulysses S. Grant saved Illinois from the postwar ravage that would have ruined it as it did the South. It is not surprising since Grant looked for a challenge. He progressively convinced the public that he was the right person for the job. Baltasar Gracian believed that, "Great ability develops and reveals itself increasingly with every new assignment." His case proves this. [From Dwight Anderson and Nancy Anderson "The Generals; James Barber *U.S. Grant: The Man and the Image*; United States Library of Congress, *Belmont Missouri*. www.americancivilwar.com/statepic/mo/mo009html, (Sept. 9, 2004); Bruce Catton *Grant Moves South* and *Grant Takes Command*; William C. Church *The Photographic History of the Civil War*; Winifred Cox, *Cairo Illinois*

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